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Item 4(b) of the provisional agenda

FOLLOW-UP TO THE EVALUATION OF THE TRADE POINT PROGRAMME

ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY THE SECRETARIAT TO IMPLEMENT VARIOUS MANDATES ENTRUSTED TO IT FOR THE TRADE POINT PROGRAMME SINCE ITS INCEPTION

Executive Summary

This document lists in chronological order all the mandates received from the various intergovernmental bodies for the Trade Point Programme since its inception. The corresponding activities carried out by the secretariat to implement these mandates, together with Trade Point Programme activities funded from extrabudgetary resources, are also presented in chronological order.

GE.99-53001

1. The Working Party on the Medium-Term Plan and the Programme Budget at its thirty-third session, on 25 to 29 January 1999, requested the secretariat to prepare a comprehensive report detailing all the activities undertaken to implement various mandates entrusted to it since the inception of the Trade Point Programme.

2. The Trade Point Programme originated from mandates at UNCTAD VIII and the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency (UNISTE) in Columbus, Ohio. Further mandates were given by UNCTAD IX and the agreed conclusions of the three sessions of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Trade Efficiency, as well as those of the three sessions of the Commission on Enterprise, Business Facilitation and Development.

3. The activities carried out to implement the mandates, decisions and recommendations related to the Trade Point Programme since its inception were covered by regular and extrabudgetary resources. The total of resources in the professional category attributed to the Trade Point Programme between January 1992 and July 1999 is 138 work months.

4. The main activities of these regular staff were the development and promotion of the Trade Point concept at intergovernmental and institutional meetings, the regional coordination of government requests and the monitoring of the implementation and development of Trade Points; preparation of all the documents related to meetings dealing with Trade Point issues; drafting of guidelines on how to establish a Trade Point; preparation and submission of several Trade Point project documents to different donors in order to facilitate the establishment of Trade Points in developing countries and more particularly in least developed countries and countries with economies in transition.

5. Among the projects related to Trade Point issues, prepared by the secretariat and presented to donors for approval of funding, a total of 20 projects were approved and funded. The majority of the projects were for the Trade Point Programme at the regional and interregional levels. Only five projects were country specific. Several country and regional project documents are still waiting for approval of funding at the bilateral and multilateral level.

6. Most of the activities carried out under extrabudgetary funds through technical assistance projects were the coordination and monitoring the establishment of Trade Points and its implementation and development at regional levels, to conceptualize, develop and implement technical tools and software to respond to the needs of the Trade Points.

First Mandate

A. UNCTAD VIII, Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, February 1992

7. The initial direction for the Trade Point Programme first appears in the Cartagena Commitment "A New Partnership for Development" (TD/364/Rev.1), paragraphs 79 and 156 to 161, as follows:

- *Paragraph 79*: "The Conference requests the Board ... to establish ... ad hoc working groups to deal ... with [inter alia] Trade Efficiency ..."

- *Paragraph 156:* "New techniques in international trade transactions and procedures are capable of producing substantial time and money savings in such transactions and procedures. These result in new trade links involving all regions of the world. Benefiting from these techniques requires a truly universal use of EDI. UNCTAD programmes should give special attention to the integration of countries and regions less advanced in this process ..."

- *Paragraph 157*: "The Conference requests the Secretary-General of UNCTAD to initiate consultations with member States so as to establish an expert group on trade efficiency ... This group will report regularly to the Trade and Development Board on the progress of its work ... The group will be responsible for producing guidelines needed to take concrete steps towards trade efficiency at the national and international levels [and] will also identify and formulate the elements necessary to the promotion and implementation of such guidelines, focusing on their legal, technical, procedural and institutional components ...". Reference is also made to the inclusion of the private sector's expertise and taking into account work by other United Nations organizations.

- *Paragraph 158*: "The culmination of these efforts of the expert group should be an international symposium on trade efficiency, to be held in 1994. This event should reinforce international discussion on the promotion of harmonized national and regional infrastructures for trade and trade efficiency ... giving priority to ways and means of promoting the participation of small- and medium-sized enterprises in international trade."

- *Paragraph 159*: "... Transparency in trade-related information should be fostered ... to access publicly available market information."

- *Paragraph 160*: "UNCTAD should continue to strengthen its analytical and technical cooperation work in the area of trade efficiency, including through experiments carried out jointly with the private and public sectors of pilot countries".

- *Paragraph 161*: With regard to the use of information technology, "Countries are urged to continue [their] efforts, especially in areas of trade facilitation..."

Action

8. The secretariat serviced the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Trade Efficiency which met three times in November 1992, November 1993 and May 1994. It also prepared the report of each of the sessions to be presented at the respective Trade and Development Board sessions in April 1993, February 1994 and May 1995, as well as to the Working Party in March 1993.

9. The secretariat started informal consultations with member States to organize the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency (UNISTE) held in October 1994 in Columbus, Ohio.

B. Ad Hoc Working Group on Trade Efficiency

Decision

10. The Ad Hoc Working Group on Trade Efficiency was established by decision 398 (XXXVIII), taken at the thirty-eighth session of the Trade and Development Board, held from 21 April to 7 May 1992, with terms of reference, which included: "To identify areas in which technical cooperation could be necessary in trade efficiency-related areas, with special regard to trade facilitation activities and the establishment of Trade Points, and possibilities to create new trade links thereby ..." (paragraph 3).

First session of the Ad Hoc Working Group

11. The Ad Hoc Working Group, at its first session, on 16 to 20 November 1992, agreed on a programme of work (see document TD/B/WG.2/4) divided into six areas: information flows to build trade efficiency, facilitating trade, 1994 symposium, the role of Governments, Trade Points and technical assistance. The last three areas of the work programme are relevant in this context, as follows:

Recommendations

(a) Working towards trade efficiency: role of Governments

(i) Study ways to improve the legal, regulatory and administrative environment for national trade efficiency;

(ii) Develop a recommendation for model laws to support electronic commerce; and

(iii) Examine how the interface between Government and the private sector and regulatory aspects of sectoral linkages can satisfy the trade efficiency requirement.

(b) Trade Points

(i) Establishment of a pilot Trade Point Programme (pilot Trade Points were selected by the secretariat using the criteria of geographical distribution);

(ii) Evaluate the Trade Point Programme (interim report) and efficiency in the use of UNCTAD assistance; and

(iii) Develop recommendations for a future Trade Point Programme's functionality, set-up, operations, training and funding.

(c) Technical assistance

(i) Training of national experts in trade facilitation and electronic data interchange (EDI);

(ii) Establishment of national trade facilitation organizations;

(iii) Expert advice with specific EDI implementation problems;

(iv) Development of suitable programmes for technical assistance; and

(v) Facilitation of workshops and 1994 symposium (the purpose of the workshops was to prepare for the Columbus Symposium).

Although the term "Trade Point" is used, it is not formally defined in this document.

Action

12. In response to the mandate, at its third executive session on 27 April 1993, the Trade and Development Board took note of the Ad Hoc Working Group's report and adopted its work programme.

13. Between February 1992 and October 1993, the secretariat received requests from 40 countries interested in establishing Trade Points. The secretariat responded to these requests by drafting and disseminating basic guidelines (see TD/B/WG.2/4) on the establishment and operation of pilot Trade Points. The secretariat prepared a "First evaluation of the Trade Point Programme. An interim report, "Note by the UNCTAD secretariat" (see document TD/B/WG.2/7, annex II) was presented to the second session of the Ad Hoc Working Group.

14. In 1993, the Trade Point Development Centre (TPDC) was created in cooperation with Trade Point Bangkok. During the first semester of 1993, UNCTAD's experts on trade efficiency went to Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Philippines and Singapore to promote the EDI concept and to participate in the establishment of pilot Trade Points.

15. In order to promote products through the Trade Point Network using the most advanced communication techniques available, the secretariat, in June 1993, developed a basic service to distribute offers and demands for products, services and investment via e-mail and news groups. This system was named electronic trade opportunity (ETO).

16. By October 1993, 17 pilot Trade Points had been established in 14 countries.

Second session of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Trade Efficiency

17. The Ad Hoc Working Group, at its second session, November 1993, adopted the Chairman's summary, which included (see document TD/B/WG.2/9, annex 1):

(a) Report on Trade Point status;

(b) Observations concerning the role of Trade Points in supporting national economic policies;

(c) Recommendations by Trade Point directors (best practices to support the effective creation of Trade Points); and

(d) Issues requiring further consideration as presented by member States. (These issues were submitted for examination to the informal working group on trade efficiency[1] on 16 June 1995.)

18. The secretariat also submitted a document entitled "Trade Point: Concept and Implementation" (TD/B/WG.2/7/Add.1). It was not officially approved but its content is partially reflected in the issues requiring further consideration.

Action

19. At the second session of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Trade Efficiency, representatives from 22 member States gave feedback on Trade Point implementation, and positive remarks were made regarding national policies, reforms and liberalization (see chairman's summary in annex 1 of TD/B/40(2)/3 - TD/B/WG.2/9).

20. During 1993, an UNCTAD mission took place in Brazil and Chile. The secretariat participated at two seminars on Trade Efficiency and Facilitation Procedures held in Mauritania in 1992 and 1993.

Third session of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Trade Efficiency

21. At its third session in May 1994, the Ad Hoc Working Group on Trade Efficiency addressed the following issues:

(a) The Government's role in trade efficiency: this item was part of the agenda but was discussed in a separate workshop for which there is no official record;

(b) Progress on implementation of the Trade Point Programme; and

(c) Consideration of "Guidelines on key sectors for trade efficiency" (see document TD/B/WG.2/11 and Add.1-5) was discussed in informal meetings and the draft recommendations for Governments are subject to further discussion in the preparatory committee for adoption at the Symposium.

Action

22. By May 1994, an additional 11 Governments had requested the establishment of Trade Points, bringing the total number of countries to 51, as noted in the Trade Point status

[1] Please see section F below for mandate and role of the informal working group on trade efficiency.

report dated 11 May 1994 (see document TD/B/40(2)/28-TD/B/WG.2/14, annex II). The secretariat responded to these requests by advising Governments on the steps to undertake in setting up a Trade Point.

23. A technical assistance project to establish a Trade Point in Armenia was prepared by UNCTAD, and was financed by the World Bank.

24. During the first semester of 1994, Trade Point experts and regional coordinators went on missions to Cape Verde, Gabon, Kenya, Mauritania, Senegal, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe to launch the Trade Point establishment process. The regional coordinator for Africa and a trade efficiency expert performed their monitoring activities and provided substantive support, in cooperation with experts in computer and information technologies, for the setting-up of the Global Trade Point Network.

C. Working Party on the Medium-Term Plan and the Programme Budget

25. At its session held in March 1993, the Working Party requested the secretariat, in connection with the outcome of the first session of the Ad Hoc Working Group, to provide an assessment of workload and financial implications of the work programme on trade efficiency.

Action

26. The secretariat prepared the budget for the biennium 1994-1995, which was presented to the Working Party.

D. UNISTE - Preparatory Committee, June 1994

27. Following the decision adopted by the Trade and Development Board at the second part of its resumed session, held from 25 to 27 May 1994, a preparatory committee for UNISTE was set up.

28. The preparatory committee considered the draft recommendations on trade efficiency and the draft Columbus declaration, which were submitted to the symposium.

E. United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency, Columbus, Ohio, USA, 19-24 October 1994

29. The official text adopted at the Symposium consists of the Ministerial Declaration and its appendix, "Recommendations and guidelines for trade efficiency". The main body of the Columbus Declaration on Trade Efficiency includes the following:

- *Paragraph 9*: the endorsement of the "practical actions, recommendations and guidelines which may be adopted by Governments, international and national organizations, and enterprises, as appropriate";

- *Paragraph 9*: the official launching of the Global Trade Point Network;

- *Paragraph 6*: "as electronic commerce is rapidly spreading to many sectors of activity and regions ..., concerted action is required in order to allow all potential traders to rely on simplified, compatible procedures and practices, and to make the best possible use of modern technologies to lower costs of international trade transactions worldwide";

- *Paragraph 7*: "the promotion of electronic commerce worldwide should be based on the principle of equality of access of all countries to systems compatible with international standards recommended by the United Nations".

30. The appendix contains a section with recommendations to Trade Points. In the introduction to the appendix, the Trade Points' role is defined as follows: they are to be a "... source of information in all areas of trade guaranteeing an equal treatment to all their partners and actively avoiding any monopoly or exclusive position in relation to service providers and other Trade Points. They assist traders in carrying out trade transactions, using modern information technology and in accordance with international standards. In addition, they are laboratories for national trade efficiency policies... The two main goals of Trade Points in assisting their national exporters and importers are to lower the cost of trade transactions and to encourage expanded participation in international trade, especially the participation of SMEs".

31. Other relevant documents include "Summaries of proceedings of the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency (TD/B/EX(8)/2-TD/SYMP.TE/7), "Report of the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency" (TD/SYMP.TE/6), and "Technical cooperation related to trade efficiency" (TD/B/EX(8)/L.3).

Action

32. During the second semester of 1994, Trade Point experts went on missions to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Mozambique, Peru, Sao Tome and Principe and the United States to present the Trade Point concept to potential participants and/or to follow up on initial activities; to identify and select a national counterpart; to define organizational and functional methods and to analyse and define the technical requirements. The regional coordinator for Africa and a trade efficiency expert performed their monitoring activities and set up, in cooperation with some experts, the Global Trade Point Network (GTPNet).

33. The GTPNet was officially launched at the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency as a first step in implementing the recommendations concerning the six sectors of trade efficiency.

34. UNCTAD organized a preparatory Trade Point directors meeting in Geneva from 6 to 7 September 1994. The participation in the meeting of 13 Trade Point directors from 11 developing countries was financed from extrabudgetary resources.

35. UNCTAD organized a second World Trade Point directors meeting in Columbus (Ohio) from 17 to 21 October 1994. The travel to and participation in UNISTE of representatives from 23 least developed countries and 16 Trade Point representatives was financed from extrabudgetary resources.

36. The first Latin American Trade Point meeting took place in Cali (Colombia) from 29 to 31 March 1995. The Trade Point directors committed themselves to strong cooperation amongst themselves to maximize the benefits resulting from the network, and created a technical committee to coordinate technical activities and development.

F. Eighth executive session of the Trade and Development Board (First part)

37. "The eighth executive session held its opening plenary meeting on 5 December 1994. After a general discussion of the main agenda item "Follow-up to the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency (UNISTE), held in Colombus, Ohio (17-21 October 1994)", the executive session was suspended and further consideration of the item took place in a series of informal consultations"[2].

38. These informal consultations led to an informal working group on trade efficiency, which met several times from January to June 1995 to deal with issues raised in the secretariat's first assessment of the Trade Point Programme. The working group addressed institutional issues including the definition and functions of Trade Points and the institutional framework of the GTPNet, technical issues concerning the interconnection of Trade Points, technical cooperation aspects and analytical and policy inputs.

39. Other questions raised concerned the institution's responsibility for the certification of Trade Points and negotiating agreements with the private sector (e.g. information technology and telecommunication services). The group was informed that, based on the advice of the World Intellectual Property Organization, the Trade Point name could be protected only at the national level.

40. The work of this informal group is reflected in decisions taken at the resumed eighth executive session of the Trade and Development Board, held in June 1995.

Action

41. Regional coordinators traveled to Bolivia, Colombia, Côte d' Ivoire, Ecuador, India, Maldives, Mongolia and Senegal during the first semester of 1995 to follow up the establishment of Trade Points and to provide advice for connecting to the GTPNet.

42. Trade efficiency and telecommunications experts developed technical tools for the active participation of Trade Points from least developed countries in the GTPNet, such as the creation of the incubator. Mirror sites were created covering all geographical regions to increase ease of access to the GTPNet. These activities were funded from extrabudgetary resources.

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[2] Document TD/B/EX(8)/2

G. Eighth executive session of the Trade and Development Board (Resumed session on 29 June 1995)

43. In June 1995, the Trade and Development Board examined the following three texts presented by the Informal Working Group on Trade Efficiency:

(a) "An international federation of Trade Points: Proposal for decision" (TD/B/EX(8)/L.2), this document assessed the feasibility of establishing such a federation, and contained a proposal for articles of association.

(b) "Conclusions on technical cooperation" (TD/B/EX(8)/L.3), this text suggested that a two-phase strategy should be followed for Trade Points: (i) introduce the concept and obtain a commitment, and (ii) reduce transaction costs with practical solutions. The priority was interconnectivity "to allow them to offer commercially valuable services to traders". Training should be part of the technical cooperation for Trade Point managers, operators and users. Coordination with other international and national bodies was necessary in order to avoid duplication and to take advantage of their expertise.

(c) "Draft criteria for the establishment and operation of Trade Points" (TD/B/EX(8)/L.4):

(i) *Objective*: "foster greater participation in international trade ... reduce transaction costs".

(ii) *Components*: "A Trade Point is ... the combination of three elements ... (a) source of trade-related information which provides actual and potential traders with data about business and market opportunities, potential clients and suppiers, trade regulations and requirements, etc. (b) gateway to global networking ...(c) a center for facilitating trade ... and where feasible, Trade Points shall develop virtual links with participants in international trade, thus allowing them to access to Trade Point services from their own premises".

(iii) *Services when fully operational*:

- Advisory services on internationally agreed recommendations on trade facilitation and best business practices;
- Assistance in conducting import and export formalities;
- Information on foreign trade regulations; and
- Information on bodies that can give further assistance.

As additional objectives, Trade Points should endeavor to "provide electronic access to ... market information, ... be a physical or virtual one-stop center for trade-related services ... provide assistance in the electronic connection of traders to services".

(iv) *Operative principles*: "confidentiality,... accuracy and impartiality of information, ... equal treatment to all (avoid monopoly), ... universality, ...

respect of internationally agreed standards, ... open telecommunication systems, ... non-exclusivity, ... best quality-price ratio, ... freest possible exchange of information among Trade Points".

(v) *Organizational considerations*: "close cooperative links with national trade facilitation/promotion bodies ... it is suggested that [a] local Trade Point Association be created (special guidelines in appendix) ... [to promote] cooperation and coordination between Trade Points in the same country".

44. The Board requested the secretariat to focus its future work on the telecommunications/global information infrastructure, the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and transport. A proposal to establish an intergovernmental group of experts responsible for the implementation of the work programme was to be presented by the secretariat. The proposal would have included the timetable and terms of reference to be considered for adoption by the Board in September 1995. However, this intergovernmental group of experts was not established.

45. The document entitled "Trade Point Programme, a first post Symposium assessment", (UNCTAD/PSM/CAS/679), dated January 1995, though not adopted by the intergovernmental machinery, is important because it defines the connection between the Trade Efficiency Initiative and the Trade Point Programme.

46. The Trade and Development Board at its 860th meeting, on 29 June 1995, adopted decision 427 (Ex-8): Follow-up to the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency and the texts annexed to this decision.

Action

47. Regional coordinators traveled to Benin, Botswana, China, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, Zanzibar and Zimbabwe during the second semester of 1995 to pursue the establishment of Trade Points and to provide advice for strengthening the GTPNet.

48. UNCTAD trade efficiency and telecommunications experts contributed to the development of the GTPNet and implemented the mirror sites and the incubator in order to facilitate the access of Trade Points from least developed countries to the GTPNet.

49. In July 1995, the TPDC moved from Bangkok (Thailand) to Melbourne (Australia) and started to develop specific tools and interfaces used by the GTPNet World Wide Web server.

50. UNCTAD participated in the second Latin American Trade Point meeting, which took place in Florianopolis (Brazil) from 10 to 11 August 1995. The three main topics of the meeting were telecommunications (Internet status, data-base exchange and other networks), services (revenue and prices) and integration (standardization of ETOs).

51. On 20 and 21 September 1995, over 80 Trade Point managers and representatives from all over the world and UNCTAD participated in the first worldwide meeting of

members of the GTPNet in Tampere (Finland). The Government of Finland financed the meeting.

52. The secretariat organized an Expert Group Meeting on financial sustainability and cooperation among Trade Points that took place in Geneva (Switzerland) from 10 to 12 January 1996. The meeting was attended by 10 representatives from nine Trade Points. The topics discussed were mainly ETOs and the GTPNet.

53. In March 1996, the secretariat's regional Trade Point coordinator for Latin America went to Barbados, Jamaica, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago and the United States to assist in the establishment of Trade Points in selected cities and to carry out technical studies for Trade Points. A Latin American Trade Point director assisted in the establishment of Trade Points in Kenya, Mozambique and Zambia and their connection to the GTPNet.

54. The TPDC with several experts in information technologies, telecommunication and banking developed search engine software to maximize the use of the GTPNet and provided technical expertise to Trade Points in developing countries. A video on the Trade Point Programme was produced.

55. UNCTAD participated in the third Latin American Trade Point meeting, which took place in Santiago, Chile from 8 to 11 April 1996. There was an agreement to integrate with the United States Trade Points and create the Inter-American Trade Point Meeting. Trade Points agreed that Trade Points from developing countries should have priority in the collection of ETOs and that an ETO standard should be adopted.

56. The secretariat organized a second Expert Group Meeting on the technical architecture of the GTPNet that took place in Geneva (Switzerland) on 21 and 22 April 1996. Three experts from the United States, Finland and France and two UNCTAD representatives attended the meeting. The topic was how to develop the GTPNet architecture and the aspects to be considered in its implementation.

Second mandate

G. UNCTAD IX, Midrand, South Africa, April-May 1996

57. "A Partnership for Growth and Development" (TD/378/Rev.1) includes the following relevant clauses:

- *Paragraph 92*: "UNCTAD's primary role [in services infrastructure for development and trade efficiency] is to assist developing countries, particularly the least developed countries and countries in transition, in generating trade supporting services ...". UNCTAD should review and assess progress with the trade efficiency initiative, including the experience gained so far in the working of Trade Points and their interoperability ... UNCTAD should consolidate the Trade Point network by making Trade Points fully operational and effective."

- *Paragraph 93*: explore means to make the Global Trade Point Network financially self-sustainable and enhance the capacity of Trade Points to function as information and training centres for SMEs.

Action

58. As of 15 March 1996, UNCTAD had granted operational status to 39 Trade Points in 25 countries, with 89 Trade Points still in the process of being established.

59. Parallel to UNCTAD IX, the secretariat organized the fourth World Trade Point Directors meeting that took place in Midrand (South Africa) from 1 to 3 May 1996. The participation in this meeting of some 33 Trade Point directors/coordinators from developing countries was financed by extrabudgetary funds. The topic was the report of the expert groups on information and standards, on financial sustainability and cooperation among Trade Points. The Trade Point representatives approved the guidelines for financial sustainability and also cooperation among Trade Points. The Trade Point directors also adopted, *inter alia*, a standard for the dissemination of ETOs compatible with a new United Nations electronic data interchange for administration, commerce and transport (UN/EDIFACT). The conclusions of the third meeting of the Latin American Trade Points held in Santiago, Chile in April 1996, were presented and a general discussion took place on the latest development in setting up and operating Trade Points worldwide.

60. The secretariat's two African Regional coordinators went to Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d' Ivoire, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe to assist in the installation of Trade Point services.

61. The TPDC created a help desk specifically for the ETOs, a browser for ETO users, a CD-Rom interface of which 5,000 copies were distributed at Midrand and an ETO Tagger software in Java script.

62. The secretariat also participated in the fourth Inter-American Trade Point Meeting, held in Lima (Peru) from 26 to 28 November 1996, where Trade Point representatives from North, Central and South America, and the Caribbean founded the Inter-American Trade Point Forum. Its main objective is to strengthen the Trade Point Network on the continent through regional cooperation and mutual assistance.

63. Activities for countries with economies in transition were also carried out this year. A feasibility study on preparing Hungary's participation in UNCTAD's Trade Point Programme was done. There were preparatory missions to Bulgaria, Romania and the Russian Federation to present the Trade Point concept, assess the feasibility of setting up a Trade Point and collect the information to prepare project documents.

H. Commission on Enterprise, Business Facilitation and Development, First session, January 1997

64. The agreed conclusions on services infrastructure for development and trade efficiency assessment (TD/B/44/2-TD/B/COM.3/4, annex II) include the following relevant text:

- *Paragraph 6*: "The Commission requests the secretariat to solicit contributions [for the purpose of expanding the Trade Point Programme]. It requests the secretariat to provide as early as possible an evaluation of the Trade Point Programme - including the extent of the inter-operability of Trade Points ..."

- *Paragraph 7*: "the Commission requests the secretariat to produce an information note on the basis of a cost-benefit analysis of practical ways and means to ensure the legal protection of the Trade Points and the Global Trade Point Network names and logos."

Action

65. At the first session of the commission the secretariat prepared an informal document entitled "Trade Point Programme, Fourth Assessment" that was made available to all the participants. This document presented the progress report made by the Trade Point Programme regarding (a) strengthening the foundations of and developing practical guidelines for the Global Trade Point Network (GTPNet); (b) the expansion of GTPNet; and (c) technical developments on the GTPNet.

66. The secretariat presented for funding a project proposal "Legal aspects related to Trade Points" to the Government of Netherlands, which was approved and endorsed. The related activities started at the end of 1997.

67. In conjunction with ESCAP, the TPDC organized in Bangkok from 21 to 23 May 1997 a Conference on Information Technologies and Electronic Trading in the Asia-Pacific Region. The main topics were global electronic trading and their technologies, and the role of Government and the private sector in the Trade Point Programme.

68. Various consultants from different regions were recruited to foster the interregional cooperation among Trade Points and to train them to use the GTPNet tools and software developed by the TPDC.

69. Secretariat officials went to: the OECD secretariat in Paris to promote the Trade Point concept; to Senegal to participate in the creation of the French and Portuguese speaking Trade Point Foru ı at the initiative of Trade Point Dakar; and to Harare to assist at the second meeting of the southern and eastern African countries meeting.

70. Regional coordinators went to Romania to finalize the project document. At the request of the Government, they visited Slovakia to assist in the selection of the hosting institution and then to the Russian Federation to follow up on the establishment of Trade Points in various cities.

71. The secretariat participated in the fifth Inter-American Trade Point Meeting that took place from 5 to 7 November 1997 in Mexico City. The discussion focused on the status of the Inter-American Trade Point Forum and the establishment of the steering committee.

I. Trade and Development Board , October 1997

72. At its forty-fourth session held from 13 to 23 October 1997, the Trade and Development Board decided that there should be an in-depth evaluation of the Global Trade Point Network [decision 444(XLIV): Review of technical cooperation activities of UNCTAD].

Action

73. In response to this request, an independent evaluation team was engaged by the UNCTAD secretariat to prepare the study.

J. Commission on Enterprise, Business Facilitation and Development, Second Session, December 1997

74. The agreed conclusions on services infrastructure for development and trade efficiency assessment (TD/B/45/3-TD/B/COM.3/11, annex II) include the following relevant text:

- *Paragraph 18:* "A rapid external evaluation of the Trade Point Programme should be carried out as soon as possible."

- *Paragraph 19*: "Governments should take appropriate measures to protect the names and logos used by the Trade Point Programme at the national level, with the assistance of UNCTAD."

- *Paragraph 20(i)*: the Commission requests the secretariat to "continue its efforts to enable [Trade Points] to achieve financial self-sustainability."

- *Paragraph 20(iii)*: the Commission requests the secretariat to "pursue its cooperation with non-governmental actors, especially in the area of electronic commerce, which will be a central item of the first meeting of Partners for Development, to be held in Lyon, France, from 9 to 13 November 1998".

- *Paragraph 20(v)*: "The Commission ... welcomes the efforts by the secretariat to promote the establishment and functioning of Trade Points in Africa."

- *Paragraph 20(vi)*: "UNCTAD should integrate new information technologies into its work to avoid being outpaced by developments in this field."

Action

75. The secretariat carried out a survey of the GTPNet by sending a questionnaire to all operational Trade Points in order to establish an indication of the general trends and characteristics of the Trade Points. The 1997 issue of the Trade Point Review was published in September 1997 (UNCTAD/SDTE/Misc.1).

76. The TPDC organized in Melbourne a meeting on secure infrastructure for electronic commerce from 30 to 31 October 1997. Issues covered included introduction of the transactional phase of the GTPNet, establishment of secure payments within the GTPNet, and a security model and network topology.

77. There was a mission to Chisinau (Moldova) to present the Trade Point Programme and to discuss the practical aspects of the establishment of Trade Points.

78. Trade Point Addis Ababa and Khartoum were visited by the secretariat to follow up on the establishment of the Trade Points.

79. In March 1998, the secretariat was invited to Venezuela to evaluate the feasibility of establishing a Trade Point in Ciudad Guayana. On the return from Venezuela, Trade Point Curaçao financed a one-day mission to discuss the Trade Point and its possible restructuring.

80. The regional coordinators visited Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Romania for following up the development of the Trade Points in each country and to discuss the new software for secure Internet access proposed by Trade Point Bucharest.

81. In June 1998, UNDP invited the secretariat to participate in a round table for donors to finance projects in Jamaica, where a component on Trade Points was presented.

82. The legal advisor to the Trade Point Programme collected the statutes of 45 Trade Points for analysis and comparison to establish common guidelines and examples of recommended practices at the national level. Assistance in the establishment of a legal entity was provided to both new Trade Points and to those who wanted to become operational. Model statutes were drafted which could serve as guidelines for future Trade Points.

K. Outcome of the Mid-Term Review, adopted by the Trade and Development Board at its eighteenth executive session, 10 July 1998

83. The only specific recommendation is in paragraph 36, which states that "the sustainability of the Trade Point Programme and Trade Points should be enhanced, particularly in respect of training, operability and interoperability, as may be recognized at the forthcoming evaluation of the programme".

Action

84. The secretariat participated in the third regional meeting of the Southern and Eastern African Trade Points held in Harare on 1 to 2 June 1998, to discuss new modalities for cooperation among Trade Points and assist in the creation of a regional forum.

85. At the first UNCTAD/UNDP Arab Regional Work Shop on Electronic Commerce, held in Cairo (Egypt) from 26 to 28 September 1998, which was initiated at the request of the Egyptian Government and coorganized by UNCTAD, Trade Point Cairo contributed significantly to the success of the meeting.

86. The secretariat participated in a regional meeting of Trade Points in the Asian Pacific Region held in Bangkok from 28 September to 2 October 1998 to discuss the possibility of creating an Asian Pacific Trade Point Forum.

87. Two consultants gave a two-week training course in Zambia and another in Ethiopia on web page design and publishing.

88. Following a training course on web design, Trade Point Bucharest developed its own web page. Project funds were allocated to software development in order to protect information on the Internet and introduce a firewall, and equipment was purchased and configured. The Trade Point was connected to the GTPNet and has produced catalogues for local companies. Marketing material was produced locally.

L. Partners for Development, Lyon (France) 9 to 12 November 1998

89. The Lyon meeting held in November 1998 was the first one organized to explore possibilities of direct cooperation between UNCTAD and civil society to support development.

Action

90. UNCTAD organized the fifth World Trade Point meeting, which took place in Lyon from 10 to 13 November 1998. A frank exchange of opinions took place on all the topics discussed during the different sessions of the meeting.

91. The 1998 issue of the Trade Point review published in English and French in September 1998 (UNCTAD/SDTE/Misc.7) covered the latest development in electronic commerce and Trade Points. The Trade Point Kit (UNCTAD/SDTE/Misc.5) was published in the six official languages. The kit presents instructions for establishing a Trade Point.

92. The fifth world Trade Point meeting, held at the same time as the Lyon summit, was financed by extrabudgetary funds. Eleven Trade Point directors/coordinators from African countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritania, Senegal, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe), eight Arab Trade Point representatives and three from Eastern European countries attended.

93. A Trade Point information technology expert visited the United Arab Emirates (Dubai and Abu Dhabi), Jordan and Lebanon and was instrumental, in identifying host institutions for Trade Points in those countries among others things. After preparation for a follow-up in beneficiary countries, a consultant on Trade Point development went on mission to Trade Points being established in Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine.

94. The secretariat decided to start the progressive return to Geneva of all the activities carried out by the TPDC in Melbourne.

M. Commission on Enterprise, Business Facilitation and Development, Third session, November 1998

95. The topic covered by this commission was electronic commerce and human resources development.

96. In the agreed conclusions on services infrastructure for development and trade efficiency assessment (TD/B/45/15-TD/B/COM.3/20) adopted by the Trade and Development Board at its third session, 14 December 1998, only paragraph 35 refers to the Trade Point Programme: "... the commission reserves its conclusions for its next session in the light of the ongoing discussion on the in-depth review of that programme in the working party on the medium term plan and the programme budget".

97. The results of the external evaluation (see documents TD/B/WP/110 and TD/B/WP/110/Add.1), were presented to the thirty-second session of the Working Party on the Medium-term Plan and the Programme Budget on 14 December 1998 and discussed at length.

Action

98. The secretariat visited Trade Point Bucharest on several occasions: 3 to 4 August 1998 to discuss the launching of Trade Point Bucharest; 14 to 15 September 1998 to attend the official inauguration of the Trade Point; 14 to 16 December 1998 to monitor the progress of the Trade Point; and 15 to 16 May 1999 to discuss legal issues related to the implementation of Trade Point Bucharest.

99. The secretariat and the legal advisor participated actively in the annual "Inter-American Trade Point Forum" meeting held in Porto Alegre, Brazil from 6 to 10 April 1999.

100. Legal assistance was provided to the forum of the French and Portuguese speaking countries in Africa and to Asian countries.

101. In response to paragraph 10 of the agreed conclusions of the Working Party adopted at its 33rd session, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD convened a meeting, from 26 to 28 May 1999 in Geneva, that involved Trade Point managers, end-users and Government experts acting in their personal capacity. The meeting was held to advise the Secretary-General on the proposals to be made by the secretariat, with respect to the implementation of the recommendations contained in the evaluation report, and also on future actions aimed at

enhancing programme delivery, especially with regard to the assistance for the Trade Points. The outcome of their consideration is contained in document TD/B/COM.3/24.

102. An information technology expert held several meetings with national government officials, private-sector representatives and individuals, with a view to identifying the most suitable institution to host the Ramallah Trade Point as well as to assess the possibilities of creating a Trade Point web page and promoting the Trade Point to local companies. In Jordan and Lebanon, the expert assessed the marketing of trade information/trade transaction services, designed the services that Trade Points should provide and prepared strategic plans for making Trade Points fully operational. Two consultants on electronic commerce and information technology went to Tunisia and Cairo to assess the technical, legal, commercial and service conditions needed for the Trade Points to conduct electronic commerce activities.

103. By a decision of the Government, the original host institution of the Trade Point in Bulgaria was changed, and it is now hosted by the Ministry of Trade and Tourism. The secretariat organized a mission to Sofia to clarify the future of the Trade Point project with the relevant authorities.

104. An expert in information technology had two Trade Point missions to Addis Ababa to assist in adapting services for local SMEs and to ensure that the Trade Point was fully connected to the GTPNet. With extrabudgetary resources Trade Point Palestine Ramallah accomplished the following: purchased equipment, paid for telecommunication costs and office supplies, hired for a six-month period a Trade Point Manager and created, designed and maintained their web site. The activities for Trade Point Casablanca included financing of an expert in information technologies for two missions to the Trade Point. The purpose of the missions was to improve the Trade Point web site, provide on-the-job training for the Trade Point staff, to design a system for collection of local ETOs and to disseminate incoming ETOs in Morocco. Another activity was to evaluate the situation in the marketing of Trade Point services and to design services to be provided by Trade Point Casablanca, including pricing policy and marketing strategy.